

*By Captain Wesley Morgan
Army Community Health Nurse*

“PREVENT UNINTENTIONAL POISONINGS”

Every 30 seconds a child is poisoned in the United States. Sixty percent of all poisonings occur to children under the age of six. National Poison Prevention Week has come and gone. We do not need a National Health Awareness week to understand the importance of the dangers of unintentional poisonings. This year's theme “Children Act Fast...So Do Poisons” emphasizes the need that all adults: parents, grandparents, baby-sitters, must always be watchful when household chemicals or drugs are being used or present in the home. So ask yourselves:

How can I prevent an accidental poisoning? There are two keys to protecting your child from accidental poisoning.

---Know what substances are poisonous! Most of us have potential poisons in every room in the house. If you have children in your home, **do a safety survey right**



away. Get down on your hands and knees and look at things from their perspective from room to room, identify the poisonous substances and move them to safe storage. Consider not only the commonly thought of poisonous substances such as medicines, vitamins and household cleaners but include alcoholic beverages, hairspray, aftershave, air freshener, perfumes, cosmetics and nail polish remover, some plants and miniature batteries. Remember to survey the garage and outside utility areas, which commonly house

pesticides, insecticides, weed killers, fertilizer, lime, anti-freeze, gasoline, kerosene, mothballs and lighter fluid.

---Put poisons away from where children can reach! Since children become more active as they grow older, review your safe storage areas frequently to be sure poisons are still impossible to reach. **Lower yourself to the height of your child and look at your home from their perspective.** Keep household chemical products out of sight of youngsters, preferably locked up.

Other poison prevention tips:

- When poisonous products are in use, never let them out of your sight—even if you must take them to answer the telephone or doorbell.
- Keep items in their original container--never transfer to cups or soft-drink bottles.
- Leave the original labels on all products, and read the label before using.
- Avoid taking medicines in front of children, since youngsters tend to imitate grown ups.

- Refer to medicine as “medicine”, not “candy”.
- Clean out the medicine cabinet periodically, and dispose of unneeded medicines when the illness for which they were prescribed is over. Pour contents down the drain or toilet and rinse container before discarding.
- Use child-resistant packaging properly - by closing the container securely after use.
- **Keep the telephone number of your local Poison Control Center on or near your telephone**

What do I do if I think that my child has swallowed a poison?

- **Remain calm and act fast!** Not all medicines and household chemicals are poisonous and not all exposures necessarily result in poisoning.
- Get medical advice even if you suspect, but don't know for sure, if your child has ingested a poisonous substance.
- Call your local Poison Control Center (phone number can be found on the inside cover of the white or yellow pages of the telephone directory), emergency department or physician.
- Be prepared to give facts to the expert on the other end of the phone.
- Have the container label ready when you call because this will provide information on the product's contents and advice on what immediate first aid to perform.
- Always keep at home a bottle of syrup of ipecac for each child or grandchild under the age of five. This can be purchased at most drug and grocery stores.
- **Syrup of ipecac** can be used with some poisons to cause vomiting **should be used only on the advice of a health professional.**
- Practice safe poison prevention techniques year round. Survey your home environment now and with each move and new residence.
- Become aware of the dangerous drugs and chemicals that are present and secure toxic items.

Additional poison prevention information can be obtained from the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Preventive Medicine Service, Community Health Nurse by calling 202-782-3964.

Emergency Phone Numbers:

- **NATIONAL CAPITAL POISON CENTER**
(Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, Northern VA only)
3201 New Mexico Avenue, NW
Suite 310
Washington DC 20016
Emergency Phone:
(202) 625-3333
(202) 362-8563 (TTY)
Administrative Phone: (202) 362-3867

FAX: (202) 362-8377

- **MARYLAND POISON CENTER**

University of Maryland at Baltimore
School of Pharmacy
20 North Pine Street, PH 230
Baltimore, MD 21201

Emergency Phone:

(800) 492-2414 (MD only)

(410) 706-7701

(410) 706-1858 (TDD)

Administrative Phone: (410) 706-7604

FAX: (410) 706-7184

- **VIRGINIA POISON CENTER**

Medical College of Virginia Hospitals
Virginia Commonwealth University
PO Box 980522
Richmond, VA 23298-0522

Emergency Phone:

(800) 552-6337

(804) 828-9123

Administrative Phone: (804) 828-4780

FAX: (804) 828-5291